Judges' housing allowance cut amid funding squeeze

BY ANTHONY WESAKA

KAMPALA. Judges of the High Court, Court of Appeal, and Supreme Court have been put on notice over a funding shortfall that will see their housing allowances paid for only two months instead of the usual three, raising concerns about judicial independence and constitutional safeguards.

According to an internal memo dated February 2 written by the Permanent Secretary and Secretary to the Judiciary, Mr Pius Bigirimana, the Judiciary has faced a shortfall in non-wage recurrent funding and non-release of capital development funds for the third quarter of the 2025/2026 financial year.

"This shortfall affected the allocation of housing allowance for quarter three of FY2025/26 by one month," Mr Bigirimana wrote.

He added that, as a result, payments would only cover the months of January and February, noting that payment for March would only be processed if additional funds are released by the Ministry of Finance.

"I will, therefore, process payment for only two months of January and February. However, if the Ministry of Finance releases more funds, I will process payment for March," the memo reads.

This publication understands that High Court judges receive Shs4 million per month as housing allowance, which has traditionally been paid in a lump sum to cover three months. Justices of the Court of Appeal/ Constitutional Court and Supreme Court get slightly more than Shs4m per month to cater for their housing.

The development has sparked concern among some judges, who argue that the move contravenes Article 128(5) of the Constitution, which provides that administrative expenses of the Judiciary — including allowances, gratuities and pensions for judicial officers — shall be charged on the Consolidated Fund.

Several judges, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of victimisation, said the Constitution explicitly protects judges from any reduction in salaries, allowances, or benefits during their tenure.

> What he says.
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"Administrative expenses, including salaries and statutory allowances like housing, are charged on the Consolidated Fund to safeguard judicial independence," one judge said. "Any variation to our disadvantage undermines that protection and is unconstitutional."

Judicial officers receive housing allowances as part of their remuneration package to ensure financial security, preserve the dignity of the office, and shield judges from undue influence, bribery, or corruption. The allowance also enables them to secure safe housing, given the sensitivity and status of their positions.

Under the Salaries, Allowances and Benefits for Specified Officers framework, the Chief Justice does not receive a housing allowance, as the office comes with a fully furnished official residence in upscale Nakasero.

When contacted, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Finance, Mr Jim Mugunga, said the matter was an internal Judiciary issue.

"The only person who can comment on it is Mr Bigirimana since the communication was through an internal memo," Mr Mugunga said.

He added that the Ministry of Finance does not dictate how available funds are spent by MDAs.

Mr Bigirimana, when contacted, said: "I have no comment on that. Those are internal issues."

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